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ABSTRACT

This paper uses a language classroom role-playing scene from a Woody Allen movie to examine the language student who has traditionally been asked to emulate and copy the native speaker and to discuss roles that teachers ask students to play. It also presents the changing paradigm of the native speaker and his or her role inside and outside the classroom. A discussion of the relevant literature shows that several scholars are beginning to challenge the monolithic view of the native speaker as the model to which the language student must aspire. The paper focuses on the specific area of teaching German language and culture, noting today's more diverse and contested approach to the teacher-learner transmission of language. It discusses issues of globalization, cultural diversification, and interdisicplinarity in conjunction with new language teaching methods, where the native speaker is asked not only to pose as a linguistic authority, but also as the cultural expert. By questioning this conflation, the paper argues for a replacement of the native speaker paradigm with the "cultural informant," who is equipped with advanced-superior proficiency and high grammatical competence. (Contains 14 references.) (SM)

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The Native Speaker, the Student, and Woody Allen: Examining Traditional Roles in the Foreign Language Classroom

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In *Radio Days*, Woody Allen's nostalgic look at 1940s New York and the radio's ubiquitous presence in people's public and private lives, Sally (aka Mia Farrow), a cigar girl working at a fashionable night club, is trying to ascend the social ladder. Her ambition is to become a radio star just like those to whom she sells her merchandise, and although, according to the narrator, she has successfully slept her way into several modest commercials, something seems to keep her from joining those few who mesmerize audiences with their sonorous voices. She decides to take diction lessons. In the scene following her momentous resolution, we witness a teacher-centered classroom filled with a medley of eager students who, quiet and attentive, hang on the instructor's words to heed the full palatal range of his utterance: "Hark, I hear the canons roar; is it the king approaching?" Language teachers are, of course, all too familiar with this scenario in which the student or students repeat what the instructor has asked them to reproduce and pronounce—correctly. In this scene, the students repeat the phrase one after the other without interruption by their teacher until it is Sally's turn. Unfortunately, Sally is not only plagued by an overpowering Brooklyn accent but also by a squeaky and feeble voice. Intently, she tries to copy her teacher's expressive and firm performance; her hands gesture as if to give the words the needed profundity, but in vain. In mid-quote, the instructor interrupts her with thinly veiled impatience: "The canons rooooar, the canons rooooar!" And although Sally tries again, her second attempt yields the opposite result as her voice becomes frantic, even uncontrollable, and her accent

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heavier, leaving an odd mix of desperation and puzzlement on her face. Allen's somber voice-over reminds us that "her natural speech was a great obstacle to get over." Miraculously, however, and with extensive practice, Sally eventually maneuvers her vocal chords to such an extent that her voice is rendered at least an octave below her usual range, her pronunciation becomes impeccable, and she is able to deliver that soft velvety sheen of the seasoned radio announcer that catapults her to the top. In a split-second cut we watch her evolve from practicing her vowels in front of the bathroom mirror to becoming Sally White and her "Gay White Way," a radio star and woman of some importance who broadcasts her programs with suave elegance and professional aplomb.

Clearly, the diction lessons were pivotal to her success in procuring the desired sociolect, to hit the right register, and the instructor should take credit for teaching her how to emulate his fine example. Later in the movie, however, we discover that Sally White has simply usurped Sally, the cigar girl. In a momentary lapse and prompted by a question about her past, Sally's voice squeals at her attentive escort, complete with her working class accent, leaving an expression of puzzlement on *his* face. Finally and irreversibly, the movie audience knows that she is, after all, just playing a role in a group in which she is not a native.

In the following I would like to take Sally's role-play as an incentive to examine the language student whom we have traditionally asked to emulate and copy the native speaker and to discuss the roles that we ask our students to play. Conversely, I will also present the changing paradigm of the native speaker and her or his role inside and outside the classroom. A discussion of the relevant literature will show that several scholars are beginning to challenge the monolithic view of the native speaker as the model to which the language student has to aspire. In fact, Paikeday (1985) has gone so far as to declare that the native speaker is dead. Though the paradigm of the native speaker is undergoing a change across the language fields, I will limit myself to the specific area of teaching German language and culture to stay within the confines of this paper, although, of course, the questions raised may apply to other languages and cultures as well. Given the changing demographics of the German-speaking countries we are studying, the assorted backgrounds of our students, and an increasing range of questions asking "what or who is German?," "to whom does the German language belong?," and "what is the value of the German language?," we are today facing a more diverse and perhaps more contested approach to the teacher-learner transmission of language. Part of this approach focuses on issues of globalization, cultural

diversification, and interdisciplinarity in conjunction with new language teaching methods, asking the native speaker not only to pose as a linguistic authority but also as the cultural expert. By questioning this conflation, I will argue for a replacement of the native speaker paradigm with what I would call the *cultural informant* who is equipped with advanced-superior proficiency and high grammatical competence.

Sally and the Native Speaker

The Sally White model of the student who copies his or her teacher's example to play the necessary or desired role in the target language community or group returns us to past methods of language instruction such as the audio-lingual method. We have witnessed a transmission-oriented class that does not question the authority of the teacher and that does not encourage individual exploration or learning in teams. In fact, the teacher becomes the prestige model, according to Alan Davies (Davies 1991, p.6), who reminds us to

> Consider the institutionalised activities of publishing and examining in the written language and of selecting radio and television news readers/casters in the spoken. In such cases there is compelling social consensus in favour of a model type being used. It is also the case that a particular type of native speaker (or native speaker-like non-native speaker) is chosen, the prestige model.

With the switch from audiolingualism to communicative language teaching, we have begun to question the roles played in the classroom. As James F. Lee and Bill VanPatten (Lee and VanPatten 1995, p.3) put it

> By roles, we mean the ways in which instructors and students view their jobs in the classroom. What do instructors do and why do they do it? Likewise, why do students do what they do? In our experience as both instructors and educators of teachers, we find that instructors must be conscious of—and then must understand—the roles played out in classrooms if language teaching is to be truly communicative.

In order to change the role of the student from passive recipient to active learner, Lee and VanPatten claim that the instructor needs to change her or his role from expert or linguistic disciplinarian to resource person or architect "who designs and plans but is not responsible for the final product." Students, in turn, become "builders" or "coworkers" (Lee and VanPatten 1995, p. 16). Since both audiolingualism and communicative language teaching are methods of how to use a language or how to build something, to stay with Lee's and

VanPatten's metaphor, are we also asking what it is that we are building? In other words, does how we get to a certain goal inform us critically about the goal we are trying to achieve, which is, in most cases, the prestige model?

As Claire Kramsch (Kramsch 1997, p. 359) has pointed out, "today foreign language students are expected to emulate the communicative skills of native speakers." Foreign language study, in turn, "acquires credibility and legitimation from being backed by national communities of native speakers, who set the standards for the use of their national languages..." (p. 359). At a time when national communities experience demographic changes that disrupt a homogeneous notion of, for example, Germany, France and other nations that previously identified themselves as non-immigrant nations, we have to ask what these standards are supposed to be, who sets them, and who they are supposed to serve. Correspondingly, for those of us teaching languages, we should want to know who transmits these standards set by the national community and whether it is in our students' best interest—be it professional or personal—to follow them. After all, now that we have encouraged these students to help build the final product within the parameters of their roles in the classroom and given their own varying identities and backgrounds, they may have very diverse interests in how to use this product. In posing these questions we may find that, although we have begun to change our methods of instruction, we still adhere to the language ideology of the national community we are trying to emulate as the prestige model.

Let's take a closer look at how the national community views its own language, in this case Germany. Csaba Földes (Földes 2000, p. 275), for example, detects a "Sprachilloyalität," a lack of loyalty to one's language, with a majority of "Deutschmuttersprachler," [those whose mother tongue is German] citing, among other issues, what he calls today's "fatale[ ] Anglisierung des Deutschen," [disastrous anglicization of German]. So who are "the Germans" today and how are "they" represented in our classrooms?[2] If we look at the history of textbook composition, especially but not exclusively for first-year language instruction, I would argue that our students have been confronted with a policy of exclusion rather than inclusion and diversity, with, yet again, the prestige model looming in the background. Most instructors of German aim to teach German Studies and speak to the interdisciplinarity of German cultures and languages; yet we teach primarily the white, falsely homogenous culture of former West Germany, with the occasional chapter on "Ausländer," "Frauen," "Die Schweiz," and "Österreich" as quick referrals to other forms of German-speaking culture. It is alarming that German language teaching has often embraced

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the political and cultural ideologies of West Germany—and its allies—while denying other German-speaking areas their own cultures that are expressed by the German language. Given restrictions of time and material, of course, we have to exclude issues and information in order to make the subject matter manageable for our students, and I agree with Földes stressing "dass die in den Texten dargebotenen ausgewählten Inhalte den Interessen und Bedürfnissen der Zielgruppe entsprechen und zur Reflexion über die Verhältnisse im fremden und im eigenen Land anregen" [that the selected topics presented in the texts relate to the interests and demands of the target group and stimulate reflection on the conditions in the foreign country as well as in one's own country] (Földes 2000, p. 282). Since these "Verhältnisse" or conditions vary significantly depending on class, ethnic background, gender, and nationality, in German-speaking countries as well as in the United States, how are we to talk about and represent them in the classroom? More importantly, how can the active learner participate as a co-builder of communicative and cultural proficiency tasks in the target language and culture without a rather vexed perspective on what the final product might be?

Cecilia and the Cultural Informant

At this point and in order to explore possible new roles in the classroom, I would like to introduce another of Woody Allen's characters, namely Tom Baxter from the movie within the movie, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. In this film the waitress Cecilia (aka Mia Farrow), frequently surrenders to the paradisiacal world of the movies to escape the harsh realities of Depression Era life and the frustrations of her marriage. In particular, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, a romantic comedy featuring the dapper and adventurous Tom Baxter, explorer of Egypt, has enchanted her. During one of the screenings, Baxter suddenly interrupts a scene with his fellow sophisticated characters, looks into the audience, declares that he is smitten with Cecilia following her repeated visits to the theater, and steps off the screen to be with her. For Cecilia a dream has come true, yet, she is obliged to tell her perfect man that things work a bit differently in the real world. Although Baxter masters the discourse of his own character with great finesse, he has to learn the practical and communicative skills that allow him to operate in Cecilia's working class world. What follows are strikingly poignant episodes in which Cecilia occasionally has to remind Baxter that he is not real, that his discourse is "movie talk" and "that's not how it happens here!" All Tom Baxter wants is to be free, free from the confines of the movie screen and from the parameters of his character--and to be with Cecilia who will show him all he has to learn.

Tom Baxter's urgent wish for freedom, however, jeopardizes the career of his model, namely the ambitious actor Gil Shephard. In trying to hunt down his freewheeling creation Shephard runs into Cecilia who, with the sweet naiveté that so wonderfully matches Tom Baxter's, leads him to the escapee. The ensuing scene could be described as a student gone bad—or free—, with the prestige model angrily trying to legitimize his claim to his creation. Despite Cecilia's previous insistence that Baxter "loves to be free, he is having the time of his life," Shephard maintains that the gulf between what is real and not real is insurmountable, and something Baxter will not be able to overcome. Upon Baxter's own confident assessment that "I can learn to be real, it comes naturally to me," Shephard simply retorts: "You can't learn to be real, it's like learning to be a midget, it's not a thing you can learn. Some of us are real, some of us are not!" After rebutting Shephard who, fuming, plans to secure the help of the police in order to reign in his creation, Baxter, in just a few words, proceeds to adopt Cecilia as his new model for the real world: "I said I was going to learn about the real world with you: show me!" Evidently, the prestige model of the native speaker, Gil Shephard, has lost its legitimacy here, making the copy—Baxter—more real than its original. Baxter rebels against the prestige model by changing from the model's unquestioning student into one who is largely inexperienced but resolutely inquisitive and to some degree self-directed. This student is more real than the prestige model because, in his empathy, curiosity, and open-mindedness (or naivité), his wish to enter Cecilia's world and leave Shephard's bespeaks the need for a greater variety of the language and culture of which the prestige model is but one example. Cecilia turns into another model, another "native speaker," but she will be just one of many and as such takes on the role of a cultural informant who relinquishes any claim to representing a prestige model. In a sense, her student is becoming downwardly mobile to widen his range of cultural and linguistic expertise.

If I thus suggest a new definition of the native speaker, I argue, based on some of my previous observations and the Tom Baxter model that we regularly employ a flawed concept that still dominates our discourse in language acquisition. Although the native speaker paradigm itself is not that old,[3] it is surprising how firmly established it has become in foreign language acquisition and applied linguistics. According to Kramsch, only since 1985 and following the "socio-cultural turn" in Second Language Acquisition have "the growing number of multilingual, multicultural speakers around the world ... continued to raise doubts about the validity of the native speaker model for foreign language study" (Kramsch 1997, p. 362). These doubts are voiced

either by suggesting new definitions of how a speaker relates to her or his mother tongue, with M.B.H. Rampton (Rampton 1990, p. 100) suggesting that we use the term's inheritance and affiliation to pay "attention to language education as a social activity" or by linguists like Noam Chomsky (Chomsky 1985, p. 58) who takes a universalist stance to proclaim that "a language is a system L-s, it is the steady state attained by the language organ. And everyone is a native speaker of the particular L-s that that person has grown in his/her mind/brain." These positions and most in between do not help us to understand the complexity of the native speaker paradigm in foreign language teaching after the socio-cultural turn, however. As I pointed out at the beginning, the native speaker today poses as a mixture of linguistic authority and cultural expert. Understandably, linguists and cultural theorists will approach this paradigm from different perspectives and with varying rationales and methods, but how are those of us in foreign language teaching supposed to negotiate its meanings and flaws? According to Alan Davies, "native speaker means having language X as one's mother tongue, as one's first language, as one's dominant language, as one's home language" (Davies 1991, p. 17). Can we necessarily assume that the same is true if we replace language with culture? Wouldn't we expect the same competence for both so that the native speaker turns into the model for the students' language and cultural behavior? Obviously, this cannot be the case, and Tom Baxter's "show me!" relegates the native speaker to the particular areas of knowledge, experience, or expertise that he or she has been able to cultivate, based on his or her personal background and individual training.

To limit the expectations for the native speaker to which both native and nonnative speakers have contributed, and to join those who dispute the paradigm's supremacy for today's foreign language classroom, I suggest that we use the term "cultural informant." This term embraces both the nonnative and the native speaker without enforcing a dichotomous constellation; it precludes anticipation of complete knowledge and expertise; it dismisses the questionable prevalence of birth and territory by eliminating "native;" and it allows for aspects of social variation such as gender, class, and ethnicity that may find expression in language. Despite possible negative connotations of the word "informant," I have in mind the distinctly general and simple meaning of "one who gives information." Who are these informants and what makes them knowledgeable about culture and language? All of us would qualify as cultural informants for one culture or another, depending on our linguistic, social, and historical involvement within that culture. However, the points of view, resources, experiences, and recommendations we espouse depend entirely on the multitudinous

facets of our personal background. Since foreign language teaching after the socio-cultural turn relies on the interrelationships of language and culture, the cultural informant would show communicative, that is, "historical, practical, effective, and contextual" competence (Davies 1991, p. 100) and grammatical proficiency, but would not have to represent the prestige model in sociolect or register.

Without doubt, most cultural informants, by way of education, will display cultural and linguistic characteristics of the middle class register, and foreign language learning will remain within certain general parameters. But these parameters do not have to exclude other linguistic or cultural registers that could become part of the classroom as well, in fact, the architectural process of communicative language learning and gaining cultural proficiency could be greatly enriched by adding other, equally representative registers. Of course, many a teacher would welcome the resources to parade a diverse group of representatives from the target culture in front of his or her students, exposing them to differences in perspectives based on age, class, ethnicity, gender and so forth. What remains after any such presentation, either via immersion or presentation, however, are the teacher and the class. The latter will most likely continue to look upon the teacher as a role model for a native-speaker-like performance because it is the teacher who prescribes the parameters for the object to be built, that is, the language product that is somehow tied to the target culture. When the teacher as cultural informant refers to her or his cultural and linguistic experience as but one amongst many, students are obliged to take greater initiative to investigate the language and culture they are asked to learn. The more learners begin to realize the complexities of both language and culture, the more likely they are to become active learners and co-builders of the classroom product. In that sense, it is not only the Tom Baxter student model that becomes free; it is also the native or nonnative speaker turned cultural informant who abandons the prestige model to find new roles and new ways of expression in the classroom and beyond.

Practical Applications of the Cultural Informant

How can we begin to apply the concept of the cultural informant practically and how may it influence the way we teach, design our courses, and prepare future teachers? In the following I will suggest uses for the cultural informant within the lower levels of language instruction; however, the application of the term can and should reach beyond that not in order to eliminate the native speaker as prestige model but to integrate it into the many possible ways of expression in a foreign language and culture.

The beginning language student usually encounters the teacher, a textbook plus ancillaries, and a certain number of fellow beginning students. Especially during the first year, most students look to the teacher and his or her use and presentation of the textbook materials to build a certain expertise in the foreign language. No matter how communicative and "architecturally" innovative the classroom atmosphere, the teacher will most likely present the unquestionable authority on the subject matter and thus function as the "native speaker" or the one closest to "native speech and culture." The result is often what Paulette (Moeller) Marisi has called "textbookish" language, partly because textbookishness corresponds to success in traditional testing situations (Marisi 1994, p. 518). With the teacher as cultural informant, we can begin to introduce a more "Baxterian" way of language learning by encouraging students to

- view the teacher/cultural informant as a basic resource
- change the one-way direction of information within the classroom to build a network of learning and exchange
- go beyond the classroom to embrace the wider university and local community by seeking other cultural informants' "building blocks" for their own language and culture product

Two phases are necessary to implement this approach.[4] Phase 1 will sensitize students to the fact that their teacher—native speaker or not—is, after all, "just" a cultural informant without encyclopedic knowledge on either language or culture. A look at one's own culture and state may facilitate such an understanding. Even if all students in a particular class are from the same state, they should be responsible for presenting "their" part of the state, "their" local culture, "their" way of speaking. If some time on the lower level has to be sacrificed to accommodate these presentations in English, so be it. This exercise may help students better understand that whenever they ask their teacher for information, however general or specific, all the teacher can do is function as the informant, especially with sociolinguistic and cultural questions. Phase 1 should also include the integration of easily accessible cultural informants (graduate students, faculty, foreign students, a local organization or business connected to the target culture, etc.) whom students should approach with the same questions. The answers contribute to the classroom learning in that students and teacher create a network of learning together.

Phase 2 will establish a network of regional experts (individuals or groups) who are to gather information on a particular region and dialect or social group that becomes part of the classroom experience.

Here, the teacher refers students to resources such as the Internet and to as many cultural informants as possible who are representatives of this region or who have lived in or visited this region. This information gathering should rotate, so that students highlight different aspects of each region and so that every student becomes an expert on a specific topic within a particular region. Ideally, the gathering and presenting of information will be coordinated between classes on the same language level to curb the potentially excessive and unreasonable use of cultural informants, to foster exchange between a larger number of language students, and to widen the net of learning and team-work. The classroom product will be one of many "builders" who —by inviting a diverse group to "show them"—have added linguistic and cultural variety to a learning experience that is based on teamwork, facilitation, and exploration.

The course design has to change accordingly. Bound by the structure of a beginning or intermediate textbook, courses, especially those taught by new TAs, frequently follow a strict trajectory of learning in order to provide students with a basic introduction to the language and culture and to pave a manageable path for the teacher. Undoubtedly, textbooks will remain an important resource. However, they are not interactive and cannot be part of a network of learning. I would suggest that we integrate more project work into our courses and to emphasize the two C's of Connections and Communities to enable the exploration of language and culture with the help of cultural informants. As a result, courses could show more of a waxing and waning pattern that would reflect a particular emphasis on one topic or project rather than trying to reserve equal amounts of time for every chapter or topic. For example, after the first two weeks of a class, students could choose which topics or projects they would like to emphasize and research more intensely. The teacher, in turn, would provide additional vocabulary and grammar functions to deepen the students' understanding and proficiency in this area. If other chapters or topics are not adequately covered it may not result in a diminished active lexis or expertise in grammar, but simply in a slightly different accentuation of what the textbook has to offer. For the language program coordinator this presents little more than a difference in the time frame of each coordinated class, depending on the students' interests. Obviously, these interests and the work involved should be reflected in how we assess the students' efforts and the effectiveness of the network of exchange. Traditional testing of grammar functions and basic skills will remain essential. But a mixing of assessments, including portfolios, role-plays, performances, interviews, posters, and presentations, to name just a few, could represent the variety of learning and

exploration that are part of each student's need for self-expression and demonstration of skills and proficiencies.

Finally, how can the concept of the cultural informant inspire the training of future teachers? We are all familiar with the MLA job descriptions that require native or near-native language ability of those who apply for any teaching position in foreign languages. Whereas graduate students who are native speakers may be relieved, those of a different native tongue may find the competition against native speakers at least daunting. I contend that we level the two groups by designating them both as cultural informants. Teaching abilities have no connection to language expertise, and a native speaker can be a poor teacher while the nonnative speaker produces a marvelously proficient student. They are and will be cultural informants whose co-construction of the classroom product will depend heavily on how they use and develop their individual knowledge in the classroom. It is necessary that TAs be introduced to the range and possibilities of this knowledge early without either feeling self-conscious about what they don't know or being overly confident in the assessment of their expertise. Team-work and the construction of a network of exchange is of equal importance for this group.

Accordingly, I would suggest that TAs be sensitized either in the first TA-workshop or their Methods class or both to their role as cultural informant. Often, native speakers are unaware of the weight their opinions and answers carry in a classroom of beginning students for whom the TA is usually the only access to the target culture. As a cultural informant they should continue to present their observations and share their experiences, while emphasizing the personal nature of the observations and experiences. Consequently, TAs should be encouraged to use each other as cultural informants in the classroom and beyond to build their own network of exchange. Even in the best of circumstances, TAs who are asked to visit each other's classes will not always do so voluntarily, and, for different reasons, they will not always approach each other for help or information. However, as cultural informants outside the target culture, they need to rely on each other for the variety of experiences and skills that make up the complexity of the culture and language they are to teach. Ideally, the application of cultural informant will enable TAs to become more reflective teachers, to continue their education in the target culture, and to professionalize their team-work.

Notes

1. In the national community of Germany, sociolinguists have focused specifically on the distinct "Kommunikationsgemeinschaften" [communities of

communication] of former East and West Germany. According to Patrick Stevenson (Stevenson 1997, p. 231), many people after the fall of the Berlin Wall "felt that they could identify whether particular radio programmes had been broadcast from the GDR or from West Berlin, basing their judgements on the speakers' speech styles. The same applies to written texts." The discourses and language practices of former West Germans remain dominant, however, as the two following examples show. Right after the fall of the Wall, Helen Kelly-Holmes (Kelly-Holmes 2000, p. 94) notes, "Reimut Vogel, Director of the well-known advertising agency, LOGO FCA, admitted that it had never even occurred to him and his advertising team that east Germans would think or speak differently and he was genuinely shocked at their inability or unwillingness to deal with the discourse." In contrast, easterners are slowly adopting western language ideologies, according to Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain (Dailey-O'Cain 2000, p. 258), who has found that, in 1994, "easterners and westerners had two competing language ideologies, with westerners contending that the most 'correct' German is spoken in Hanover and easterners contending that it is spoken in the whole of northern Germany. One year later, ... there is a strong new tendency for easterners to adopt the western ideology that the most 'correct' German is spoken in Hanover. Yet this tendency is mitigated or blocked in easterners with certain characteristics: a high level of education and political affiliation with the [leftist, A.F.] PDS."

2. Albert Valdman (Valdman 2000, p. 649) discusses similar issues in French instruction in the Unites States, characterizing the goal to reach native-speaker-like competence as "un objectif réductionniste": "En fait, une competence de communication véritablement native représente un objectif réductionniste pour des apprenants alloglottes puisqu'elle ne caractérise qu'un groupe particulier de la communauté linguistique cible, par exemple, la compétence communicative d'adolescents parisien, celle de quadragénaires cultivés de la Touraine, etc." [In fact, a truly native communicative competence represents a reductionistic goal for language learners because it characterizes but one particular group in the target language, for example, the communicative competence of Parisian teenagers, the competence of cultivated forty-year olds from Touraine, etc.].
3. "When was the first use of the term? I cannot find anything earlier than Bloomsfield's Language (1933)." (Davies 1991, p. x).
4. I am indebted to Gabi Kathoefer for suggesting the two-phase process.

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